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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of collaborative writing software and simultaneous electronic chats in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Most ESL students have little experience using word processing software, and most have no keyboarding experience. Using electronic chat sessions assists ESL students with sentence construction, vocabulary building, reading comprehension, and thinking skills. Visual evidence of participation gives students a means of measurable accountability and motivates many to participate more in this medium than in a traditional class setting. Transcripts of the chat sessions are used by the students for reference material for developing composition ideas, and by the instructor for evaluating the performance of individuals and groups in terms of topic, fluency, accuracy, and logic. As in traditional classroom instruction, planning and preparation are essential for effective learning. With proper execution (technical, instructional, and topical), electronic chats can increase student participation, facilitate discussion of class readings, and enhance critical thinking. Electronic collaboration encourages discussion of ideas from different perspectives and builds teamwork. As it focuses on the process of writing, students learn to put their ideas in written words, express their ideas more clearly, and become more excited about learning. Sample transcripts of two chat sessions are appended. (SWC)

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No Talking, Please, Just Chatting: Collaborative Writing With Computers

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NO TALKING, PLEASE, JUST CHATTING: COLLABORATIVE WRITING WITH COMPUTERS

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TAP TAP TAP

Walk into the computer lab 15 minutes into a class session and what might you see? 25 Macintoshes on, each with at least one rapt student staring at it quietly. No sound but the persistent tapping at the keyboard. The students alternately key in a sentence or two, and then ponder other sentences that suddenly pop up on their screens. What are these students doing? They are interacting with their peers via computer using collaborate chat software.

NEW TO TECHNOLOGY

To most English as a Second Language (ESL) students, using word processing software such as Microsoft Word to write and revise their compositions is already a new experience. While a few may have typing experience, the majword processing software such as Microsoft Word to write and revise their compositions is already a new experience. While a few may have typing experience, the majority have no keyboarding s

ASPECTS SIMULTANEOUS CONFERENCE SOFTWARE

The students are engaged in electronic chats using a collaborative writing software program called Aspects. At the moment, they are involved in synchronous chatting, that is, real-time electronic verbal interaction. They are prompted by the written entries of their chat group members and they contribute to the discussion right on the spot.

Every time a student enters a statement or question, his or her name automatically precedes the response; thus all discussants know who has made which contributions. The computer screen displays the entire running dialog real-time, as it is created, and they can easily see the relationship of their ideas to the others in their chat group.

SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION, VOCABULARY BUILDING, READING COMPREHENSION, THINKING SKILLS

In this scene, the students have logged into a chat of their choice, according to topics of interest voted on in class the day before. Cigarette Smoking is a hot topic requiring three chat groups. Air Pollution, Homelessness, and Gun Control each have several discussants. Recently, these ESL students have been studying and practicing the use of

gerunds and infinitives - beastly structures for the non-native English speaker to master. Now is the time for them to apply these structures in thoughtful and meaningful dialog: I'm in favor of..., I'm opposed to..., I go along with..., What about..., We should stop...

JUST CAN'T STOP!

The end of the class session is nearing. The students are given a ten-minute warning, then a two-minute warning. They are urged to say good-bye to their chat partners and log off. Still, voices silent, they tap-tap-tap, reluctant to end their discussion, finding irresistible the addition of one more viewpoint on the topic. Just one more idea! Just one more sentence, pleeeeease!

ORAL CHATTING VS. ELECTRONIC CHATTING

We adjourn to another room to debrief after the electronic chat. The room is abuzz with tremulous vocalizations of their experience. Using a booming voice to hush the cacophony, I finally get a word in edgewise.

```
Q. Did you like it?      - A roar of approval fills the room.
A. It was fun.
A. We used the computer.
A. We really discussed seriously.
A. Yes!  Let's do it again.

Q. Was it hard?
A. I didn't know how to start.
A. At first, I joined the wrong group.
A. I couldn't find the letters fast enough to type my ideas.
A.  I need to learn to type.

Q. What are the similarities of chatting face to face and chatti
     computer?
A. We're discussing the same kinds of topics we do in person.
A. We're practicing the same kinds of vocabulary and grammar.
A. I might have the same partners in my face-to-face group as in
      electronic chat group.

Q. What are the differences between chatting face to face and ch
      electronically?
A. We're practicing our writing and reading, not our speaking an
      listening.
A. I'm practicing my typing.
A. We're using only English.  (Ten hoots of joy for their actual
       and realization of this one!)
A. We *have to* participate.
```

Clearly, the students have figured out that nonverbal cues like nodding or sighing just won't work in this environment, and sitting out passively while others take charge of the air waves, as is often done in face-to-face discussion, leaves a remarkable silence in the chat. Visual evidence of participation gives students a means of measurable

accountability and motivates many to participate more in this medium than in a traditional class setting. That English is the language of their electronic communication, instead of Farsi or Chinese or Korean as is common in an oral interface, is another significant result and added benefit in the ESL classroom.

CHAT TRANSCRIPTS

The students' chat transcripts can be copied into a word processing document in Aspects or into another word processor such as MS Word. The printed chats can be used by the students as reference material for developing composition ideas. As a means of appraisal, the printed chats can be used by the instructor to evaluate the performance of individuals and groups in terms of topic, fluency, accuracy, and logic.

SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS CHATS

In synchronous mode, discussants can respond to questions as a team, discuss last night's assignment, write an essay together, brainstorm topics, and edit each other's essays. They can role play characters of a story, learning to take on the persona, language, thought and behavioral patterns of another person. Varying levels of mediation are possible, from a free range of "speak" all you want whenever you want to a discussion controlled by a moderator who "passes a pen" to the discussant who "raises a hand" to add a comment or question. The chat box can occupy the whole screen for major discussions , or it can shrink to a small area of the computer screen for commenting on a shared document (word processing, drawing or painting) simultaneously viewed on the screen by all group members.

In addition, participants may engage in collaborative writing and discussion in the asynchronous mode, in which case entries need not be made concurrently. For this, the instructor generates a discussion topic and students may go to the lab out of class, read what previous writers have written and write their responses to the original writing prompt as well as to their classmates.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Naturally, as with all great teaching, proper lesson planning and preparation are essential for effective learning to take place. Unless your students are keyboard savvy technologically advanced computer literati, I would advise devoting your first chat session to becoming familiarized with the mechanics of opening the software and navigating the chat groups as well as the concept and process of chatting. Subsequent chats should have specific instructional objectives and desired outcomes. Here are just a few examples that are appropriate for native and non- native speakers of English:

Example 1: Role-play. The Fisherman and his Wife Join your group. Open the chat box to full screen size. One participant is to take on the role of the Fisherman, another the Wife, and the third the Fish. Recreate the fairy tale we read and discussed orally

yesterday by "talking" to the other characters in your chat group. Remember to use present unreal conditionals to express wishes for things that don't exist now. Later, we will print out all the chats, compare them, and choose the one that best preserves the story line and characters while providing good examples of dialog.

Example 2: Discuss the unsolved mystery. Read the unsolved mystery in the shared document. In your chat box, discuss with your partners what might have, must have, or could have happened. Realize that no one has any concrete answers, so suggest any ideas that come to mind. Later, you will receive a copy of your chat, and you will use it as a reference to write a paragraph on the topic.

Example 3: Peer Editing. Moderator, please load your essay into a shared writing document. Open a chat box. Group members, join the moderator's chat. While viewing the moderator's essay, give the moderator comments and constructive criticism in your chat box. After the chat, the moderator will print out the chat and incorporate comments into a revision of the essay.

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING

I'm convinced that, with proper execution (technical, instructional, and topical), these types of electronic chats can increase student participation, facilitate discussion of class readings, and enhance critical thinking. Electronic collaboration encourages discussion of ideas from different perspectives and builds teamwork. As it focuses on the process of writing, students learn to put their ideas in written words, express their ideas more clearly, and become more excited about learning. That the transcripts can be saved gives the instructor and students access to a wealth of material which stimulate further thought and provide the basis for future lessons.

RUNNING ASPECTS

Aspects, a product of Group Logic, runs on every Macintosh, from the Plus to the PowerMac, on System 6 or 7, and requires just 1 MB of memory. It can be used on a "real network" or across cables used for printer sharing. It works with or without a file server, and it can be used with any modem and over the Internet. For more information, call 1-800-476-8781 or e-mail info@grouplogic.com.

APPENDIX 1: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO THIS CLASSROOM?

The ESL students in this group examined an illustration of a terribly messy classroom. Their assignment was to discuss what actions should be done to improve the condition. Passive voice constructions were to be used as often as possible. Here is an excerpt:

```
Maggie & tuan :  Hi!  Jose,  We  are looking for you! What are you do
  :  We are going to start over exercise seven.
Maggie & tuan This:  In exerciese 7, we look this room very mess for
picture.
```

```
  :  Yes , the walls have to be painted.
 Anu :  hi
Maggie & tuan This:  1: The The trash can has to be cleaned.
 Anu :  Ok. It can be done
  :  The trash has to be taken away.
 Anu :  Hi. Jose why are wonder by seeing my  name
 JOSE AND JUDY:  Hello.
Maggie & tuan This:  Who answers the question? No name inside the
computer. How come?
 Anu :  The room has to be cleaned
 JOSE AND JUDY:  Anu, we have to work on exercise seven page 153.
 Anu :  Yes I'm on it jose and Judy
 JOSE AND JUDY:  The floor has to be swept.
Maggie & tuan This:  The light has to be replaced new one on ceiling.
 JOSE AND JUDY:  Yes, it will be done by the janitor.
 Anu :  It has to be done...
 Anu :  The table has to be organized.
 JOSE AND JUDY:  The pictures should be hang properly.
 JOSE AND JUDY:  The documents should be rearranged.
 Anu :  Yes , it has to be arranged
 JOSE AND JUDY:  OK, What else should be done?
 Anu :  The blackbord has to new
Maggie & tuan This:  No. that'll cost too much for the janitor. We de
repair by ourshelives.
 JOSE AND JUDY:  The plants ought to be watered. The blackboard has t
be changed.
 JOSE AND JUDY:  The pizza should be eaten. The lights have to be
repaired.
```

The above transcript and that of the other groups' chats were compiled and distributed. Using an overhead transparency, I was able to point out stronger and weaker examples of following the topic, as well as appropriate and inappropriate use of sentence structure and vocabulary.

APPENDIX 2: EXPERIMENTAL MEDICINE

The students in this group read and discussed a dilemma involving a sick wife and an expensive experimental medicine. The students were instructed to use past modal constructions with should have, ought to have, could have, and might have.

```
TRI:  Should Pierre have told his wife to try the new medication?
jeenie:   Pierre should have worked on night and weekends.
Hua xing:  Pierre have to worked all day.
COMPUTER 14:  Pierre's insurance should've pay for the medication.
jeenie:  Pierre ought to have taken care of his wife after work.
TRI:  Should he not have bought that insurance company?
Hua xing:  His wife ought to have down exercise  every day.
Katherine:  The pharmacist should've give pierre the medication and l
pay later.
Hua xing:  Pierre should have taken care of his wife every day.
Ranu:  She shouldnot do the exercise every day because she is sick al
jeenie:  Should doctor have tried another way to save Pierre's wife?
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TRI:  Ought he to have spent much money for the new medicine to save
wife life?
Hua xing:  Pierre should have made many good for his wife.
Ranu:  HER HUSBAND SHOULD TAKE CARE HER WIFE.
TRI:  Should he have asked to lend money from someone else?
jeenie:  The pharmacist ought to have agreed pierre to pay for the me
later.
Hua xing:  Pierre's wife should have seen doctor.
TRI:  She ought to have gone to see the doctor.
Hua xing:  Pierre should have done housework every day.
jeenie:  He could have borrowed the money from bank.
Katherine:  Pierre could have asked for help on his relatives.
TRI:  He should have done housework every day that could have saved t
for his wife to rest.
Hua xing:  Pierre's wife should have eaten medical every day.
jeenie:  He might have visited another pharmacy .
```

Transcripts were printed and distributed and used by individual students as reference material for the development of an essay on the dilemma faced by the main characters in this situation.